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ABSTRACT

Teachers should look to mentors for leadership as they move into the 21st century. Mentors serve a valuable purpose in a discipline which is constantly on the move--not only do they provide leadership and guidance to new teachers, but the newer teachers also provide a new perspective from which the seasoned veterans can benefit. A large pool of prospective mentors should be assembled well in advance of when they will be needed, with responsibilities clearly outlined so that only those who are willing will participate. A mentor should also be a competent instructor and many of the same criteria may be used in the selection of mentors as are used in making promotion and tenure decisions, such as portfolios, evaluations, and interviews. The mentoring program should stress that the individuals develop a unique relationship and that the mentor provide assistance tailored to the needs and desires of the new instructor. Mentees have indicated five areas of desired assistance: (1) teaching style; (2) instructional strategy and teaching resource selection; (3) classroom management methods; (4) time management; and (5) on the high school level, working with parents. Mentoring relationships can improve the teaching of the new instructors, increase their desire to remain in education, ensure their continued professional development, and affect the positive development of the teaching profession. (Contains 20 references.) (CR)

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Mentors in the Classroom, Not Just Someone Who Can Show You to Your Office

A Brief Summary of the Literature

A Paper Presented at the Speech Communication Association Annual Meeting

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Mentor, in Other Words:

- Coach
- Counselor
- Role Model
- Cheerleader
- Facilitator
- Resource
- _____

Responsibilities of Mentors

Assisting With:

- Emotional Support
- Classroom Teaching
- Personal and Professional Growth

Mentors in the Classroom, Not Just Someone Who Can Show You to Your Office:

A Brief Summary of the Literature

As teachers we should look to mentors for leadership as we move into the 21st century. A mentor should not be someone to whom we are assigned, and then forgotten. Mentors serve a valuable purpose in a discipline which is constantly on the move. Not only do they provide leadership and guidance to new teachers, but the newer teachers also provide a new perspective from which the seasoned veterans can benefit. This paper seeks to outline the characteristics of successful mentoring programs and mentors, responsibilities required of successful mentors, benefits of mentoring relationships, and the ways upon which the relationship can be capitalized. The result will be better, more confident new teachers as well as veterans who are not buried in a sea of yellowed notes.

At first look, much of the research on mentoring relationships has been in public high schools. Yet, assistant professors face many of the same challenges in implementing lesson plans, managing students, researching, and performing departmental duties as do teachers in public high schools. Thus, it seems that the same strategies and responsibilities of high school teachers can serve to benefit university faculty and departments as well, making the transition from graduate teaching assistant to assistant professor much smoother. Further, the stresses of the new teacher, as Klausmeier (1994) points out, can lead to frustrations, health problems, and even to individuals leaving the profession. Clearly the need for mentoring is apparent.

Characteristics of Successful Mentoring Programs and Mentors

In order for the mentoring program to be carried off successfully, Ganser (1995) recommends putting together a large pool of prospective mentors, well in advance of

when they will be needed. This assures that the individuals are willing to participate and eliminates the last minute problem of having to find anyone who is breathing to serve as a mentor. Of course, such a situation cannot benefit either the new instructor or the mentor.

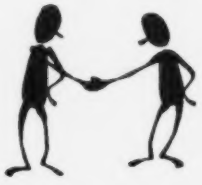
Those who are mentors should be willing to participate in such a program, and be willing to put in the time such an involved relationship deserves. Clearly outlining the responsibilities of prospective mentors, such as time commitments, classroom visits, one on one discussions, interactions with other mentors, and the like, can assure that only those who are willing to put in the time, will participate. The mentors should be committed to developing competent new instructors and be willing to provide not only the resources, but the emotional support and time that such an individual needs.

While it should go without saying, the mentor should be a competent instructor as well. This means that the individual has at least five years of teaching experience in the current university. Better yet, the instructor should be tenured, so that s/he will not be worrying about his/her university obligations and will have some time to devote to the mentee. The mentor should be someone with solid evaluations from students, other professors, and university personnel.

When choosing mentors, many of the same criteria may be used in selection as are used in making promotion and tenure decisions, such as portfolios, evaluations, and interviews. Furthermore, by using such information in selecting mentors, faculty understand that this is an important decision. Additionally, such material may be made available, with the faculty's consent, to the new instructor as part of the mentoring process.

Additionally, the mentor should have some skill in working with adults. It is not necessarily the case that if the mentor is successful in the classroom, s/he will necessarily be successful in mentoring a colleague. Thus, the success of the prospective mentor's work with other faculty on committees, team teaching, and professional development opportunities may be an important indicator of this skill. Further, the mentor must demonstrate that s/he takes teaching seriously in order to move the mentee in the right direction. The mentor must be able to communicate by example the appropriate way to find a balance among teaching as a profession, teacher ideals, daily experiences, and home and social or personal life.

A final caveat is offered by Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, and Niles (1992) who in their article assessing beginning teachers' concerns, argue that the mentoring program can be most beneficial to all when it does not seek to rigidly specify the responsibilities of the mentor. Instead they discuss the benefits of collaboration in providing support and assistance tailored specifically to the new instructor's needs, which only experienced mentors can supply. Thus, the characteristics of mentoring and mentors as outlined in this paper are only guidelines. The mentoring program should stress that the individuals develop a unique relationship and that the mentor provide assistance tailored to the needs and desires of the new instructor.



Responsibilities of the Successful Mentor

According to Klausmeier (1994) mentees have indicated five specific areas in which they would like assistance. Four of those areas apply to the university setting. They are

(1) teaching style

(2) instructional strategy and teaching resource selection

(3) classroom management methods

(4) time management

The fifth area involves working with parents successfully, and applies only to those individuals working on the high school level. In addition, the mentor should be able to provide help in the personal and emotional development of the mentee and in helping the mentee develop strategies for interacting with all individuals associated with the school or university, from the students to the administrators to the counselors. In all areas, the mentor should be able to serve as a mediator to provide guidance to the beginning instructor.

Furthermore, the successful mentor is someone who can balance his/her own teaching and professional responsibilities in order to give ample time to the new instructor. Successful mentoring requires

(1) sensitivity to the mentee's concerns

(2) an enthusiasm toward teaching

(3) an encouraging rapport with the mentee

(4) giving praise

(5) helpfulness, not authoritarianism

(6) an emotional commitment

(7) an ability to anticipate problems

(8) problem solving ability (Klausmeier, 1994)

DiGeronimo (1993) discusses a successful mentoring program which has been implemented in Daly City, California. The mentors who are part of this program are expected to take on several responsibilities which include:

(1) answering questions on any school related subject

(2) providing guidance regarding lesson planning, teaching, and discipline

(3) providing support and encouragement during good as well as difficult times

(4) assisting in test writing and homework development strategies

(5) consulting with the mentee when needed

(6) advising instructors how to deal with students, administrators, parents, etc.

(7) keeping new instructors apprised of deadlines

All in all, the responsibilities of mentors seem to cluster in three areas: emotional support, classroom teaching assistance, and personal and professional growth. Such a positive relationship in the first year of teaching can only foster benefits, as the next section briefly indicates.

Benefits of Mentoring Relationships

Klausmeier (1994) specifically argues that the mentoring relationship can improve the teaching of the new instructors, increase their desire to remain in education, ensure their continued professional development, and affect the positive development of the teaching profession. Odell and Ferraro (1992), in a four year study, found that the

mentoring relationships developed between new instructors and mentors may have been what kept the new instructors in the profession. Furthermore, the new instructors most valued the emotional support that they received from their mentors.

One area that has not been much researched is the benefit to the mentors. Huling-Austin (1992) suggests that the mentors may also benefit in learning how to talk with new instructors. Mentors learn about educational theory and how to integrate subject matter and theory in their discussion with the new instructors in such a way as to facilitate the educational development of the new instructors. Additionally, Williams (1995) believes that the new instructors can teach a few things to the experienced teachers, such as new teaching methods. Ganser (1995) takes the benefits even further, suggesting that not only do the mentor and mentee benefit, but so do the school or university, the community, and the students.

Capitalizing on the Mentoring Relationship

But the challenge of capitalizing on such a program remains. If mentoring relationships are to be successful, Ganser (1995) suggests three considerations when pairing the mentor with the mentee.

(1) The mentor and the mentee should have similar teaching assignments. This allows for the exchange of syllabi and teaching strategies, discussion of textbooks, and the basic exchange of ideas that is necessary in such a relationship.

(2) The mentor and mentee should have similar standards when it comes to teaching and learning. Clearly they should not be identical and probably will not be, but differences which are too great can only serve to get in the way of effective mentor-mentee communication.

(3) The mentor and mentee should be able to access one another readily. Physical proximity is important in order for the individuals to get together for formal or informal meetings. In addition, the mentor and mentee should be able to visit one another's classroom or office.

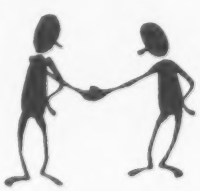
Nelson Garner (1994) describes the mentoring relationship as one of mutual agreement between the two individuals which requires each to appreciate as well as listen to the other. In addition, Nelson Garner (1994) provides very important information about dealing with differences regarding sexual orientation, race, gender and character. Ultimately, the individuals in the relationships should treat one another as just that, individuals who are special, who need academic as well as emotional support in a non-biased way.

Jarmin and Mackiel (1993) discuss four factors which affect the successful outcome of mentoring relationships. In order to capitalize on such a program, the mentor should be instructed to continue interaction with the beginning instructor throughout the year, not just at the beginning of the school year. The new instructor may need continued contact during those especially busy times such as midterms and finals, yet this is when contact seems to dwindle. Second, the individuals should decide on a meeting location such as one of the teacher's classrooms or offices. Alternating between offices may be the best alternative so that each individual has an opportunity to feel comfortable in the meeting space. Third, the time commitment requires that individuals be willing to give of their time in order to capitalize on the mentoring relationship. This means being willing to meet outside of the instructional day to discuss the concerns of the new instructor. Finally, the individuals must be willing to plan for time when they can interact for a

substantial amount of time. Just talking in the hallway or in passing will not allow each individual to benefit from the mentoring relationship.

Ganser (1995) acknowledges that the mentoring relationship may be difficult for those involved since new instructors may be overly sensitive and mentors may feel too authoritarian. Yet, if each individual realizes the perceptions of the other and approaches the relationship in an open and honest way, both parties may make the most of the mentoring situation.

Clearly, mentoring relationships have been shown to work in numerous instances, and their benefits are crucial to developing highly skilled professors who can handle the challenges presented to them in the future. By outlining briefly the characteristics of successful mentoring programs and mentors, the responsibilities of successful mentors, the benefits of mentoring relationships, and the ways upon which the relationship can be capitalized, this paper has only scratched the surface of the available information on mentoring. Yet, such information is vital if speech communication as a field is going to "take the helm" in a practical effort to educate professionals as we educate our students.



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